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# Death shall die : a dialogue for oral interpretation

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*University of the Pacific*

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DEATH SHALL DIE  
A DIALOGUE FOR ORAL INTERPRETATION

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Department of Speech  
University of the Pacific

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Richard Kendall Williams II  
June 1962

This thesis is approved for recommendation  
to the Graduate Council.

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Howard L. Runion

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Dated May 18 1962

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## INTRODUCTION

When a writer desires to express a feeling rather than merely a fact, a strict research method of writing is not always the most effective. If one is not bound by the historical facts of a situation, he may make his treatment dramatic and greatly help an audience experience his feelings by speaking in the first person or by attributing his words to some other person. Because aesthetic and emotional communication is possible only through one of the major fine arts, the present writer decided to prepare a creative thesis entitled "Death Shall Die." It is hoped that through this thesis an illusion will be created, a human experience will be communicated, and--since truth is the aim of literature--a truth will be clarified. The chief difficulty encountered in this thesis was that problem common to all art--the problem of transmitting to an audience an experience with intensity and meaning.

It has been agreed upon that the thesis itself shall consist of an original oral reading selection rather than the usual written thesis. The following few pages of explanation therefore, should not be considered the thesis, but are submitted as a supplement to the thesis. A copy of the oral reading follows the explanatory material. It is well to bear in mind that the selection has been written to be heard rather than read; therefore, the appreciation of the

work gained from reading it may not be the same thing as that gained from hearing it performed. While one may profit by reading this thesis, the nineteenth century French scholar, Paul Lorain, reminds us that if we read such a selection rather than hearing it, the work may be "like a dried flower: the substance, indeed, is there, but the color is faded and the perfume gone."

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## CHAPTER I

### DEFINITION OF ORAL INTERPRETATION

Oral interpretation is not a list of effects to be obtained. In spite of unfortunate impression made by reciters and elocutionists of not so many years ago, reading aloud is one of the finest of fine arts.<sup>1</sup> Sincerity is of major importance first, last, and always. Unless a reader has sincerity urging him to share with an audience what he sees and feels as he sees and feels it, his presentation will be shallow and his audience dissatisfied. It is necessary for us to realize these factors if we are to have any success in preparing a selection for oral reading.

The minimum of appropriateness, then, will be oral reading which has at least three qualities: (1) it must make sense and be logically defensible; (2) it must present the attitudes and reactions of a believable human being; and (3) it must arouse favorable attention.<sup>2</sup> It is easy to see that the bare minimum has nothing to do with artiness, but has much to do with art.

Oral interpretation is sometimes referred to as oral reading, reading aloud, interpretive reading, and interpretive

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<sup>1</sup>Mabel Pearl Lloyd and John Tryon Marshman, Modern Short Stories for Oral Interpretation (Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Company, 1933), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph F. Smith and James R. Linn, Skill in Reading Aloud (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 7.

speech. Although the name itself is not of chief concern, this variety of terminology causes some confusion in definition and aims, as well as in standards of performance.<sup>3</sup>

Interpretation, as the term has been accepted in academic circles, is a discipline no less demanding than other arts. An artist by his penetrating insight, knowledge, and skill reveals form and essence in the nature of all things and gives an "ideal copy" of reality. This is true of the painter, the actor, the sculptor. Moreover, it is true of the oral interpreter. He also is a creative artist. In his skillful presentation of the thoughts and emotions of the author or the author's imaginary persons, the interpreter is creating the kind of illusion on which all the other arts are founded. By the power of his imagination he is developing a feeling as genuine as the author's; the reader may even go further and reveal depths unfelt by the author.<sup>4</sup> He is not merely giving vocalization to the process of silent reading. He becomes acutely involved in art--the art of oral reading. Just as all activities classified as art are successful only through the skillful use of technique,

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<sup>3</sup>Otis J. Aggertt and Elbert R. Bowen, Communicative Reading (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), pp. 4-5.

<sup>4</sup>Wayland Maxfield Parrish, Reading Aloud (third edition; New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1953), p. 419.

effective interpretation can result only from techniques so integrated and blended as to develop an illusion of reality.<sup>5</sup>

It is now evident that the interpretive reader, endeavoring to communicate the author's ideas as he himself understands them, must use his entire visible personality in meaningful ways. He appeals to both the ears and the eyes of his listeners. He not only must communicate audibly, but also visibly if he hopes to achieve a contagious transference of appreciation for a work from reader to listener. This desire to share appreciation is quite natural to us.<sup>6</sup> We enjoy transmitting our understanding of a work to others.

In this study, therefore, interpretation means "the oral communication of ideas and feelings from the printed page to an audience, so that the listeners will understand the ideas and will experience the feelings."<sup>7</sup> As a point of clarification it should be noted that throughout this study the terms oral interpretation, interpretation, and oral reading will be used interchangeably and will refer to this definition.

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<sup>5</sup>Charles H. Woolbert and S. E. Nelson, The Art of Interpretive Speech (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1956), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup>Aggertt and Bowen, loc. cit.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER II

### IMPORTANCE OF ORAL INTERPRETATION

A tremendous torrent of printed matter pours daily from the presses of our land. Somehow all of this material gets read by someone; however, most of this reading is done privately and silently for the personal satisfaction of the individual reader. Most writing is not voiced, either by the author who creates it, or by the reader whom it is intended to affect. In our age of mass communication the days when grandfather read aloud to the family from the Bible have slipped away.<sup>1</sup> No doubt such oral reading helped to form the taste of many speakers, writers, and listeners. The nineteenth century saw a host of skilled, unskilled, and overskilled public readers interpreting literature for millions of listeners. The current practice of private silent reading deprives us of many values that our forefathers enjoyed--values social, cultural, and spiritual, as well as educational.

In spite of these facts oral interpretation seems to be making a comeback. It appears that in the future more and more individuals will be called upon to interpret to others the printed page. While grandfather may no longer

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<sup>1</sup>Parrish, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

be reading in the parlor, it is becoming almost impossible for persons pursuing some sort of higher education to escape situations which will require reading something aloud. It is useless for one to do such reading if he does not fulfill his purpose; if his reading is not crystal clear. The recent success of Agnes Moorehead, Charles Laughton, Charles Boyer, Charlton Heston, and many other Broadway and Hollywood stars is encouraging, for literature like music is in need of translation from symbols to sounds.

Some works are ultimately meant to be read aloud and no matter how finely attuned the mind's ear, a silent reading can never reveal the full cadence of rhythm and sound in a work that finds its highest expression in an oral performance.<sup>2</sup>

The same feeling, that literature does profit from the interpreter's art, has been expressed by the late Professor S. H. Clark:

I believe there is no better way to inculcate the love of literature than by having it read aloud. We talk glibly of the sonorous rhythm of Milton's verse but cannot quote a line. We talk of the fertile imagination and sublime passion of Shakespeare but how many of us ever pick him up for an hour's reading? We talk of the tenderness, of the homeliness of the Lyrics of Burns but never read them.<sup>3</sup>

Such literature is the wealth of ages. It mirrors the most instructive experience of the human race. The fullness and

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<sup>2</sup>Charlotte I. Lee, Oral Interpretation (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Lloyd and Marshman, loc. cit.

richness of this literature can be made accessible to a considerable number of people through the oral reader whose standards of taste and abilities are approximately commensurate with the standards of those who have created the work.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from the purely artistic consideration, there are educational advantages to be found in oral reading. By preparing a selection for oral reading one can get a better understanding of the structure of language. By having to make the meaning of a work clear to a critical audience, one receives an appreciation of the sometimes intricate interrelationships of the parts of a sentence--of modification and subordination, of balance, and contrast.<sup>5</sup> At the same time the student is sharpening his sensitivity to character, to emotion, and to fine literature.

Moreover, justification for the study and practice of oral reading can be found in the fact that one should improve his speaking skills, both public and private. Sharper diction, improved voice, skillful use of facial expressions and gestures, and improved poise and confidence should result.<sup>6</sup> Such abilities and qualities are aids in speech correction, acting, radio and television, and public speaking. From a

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<sup>4</sup>Parrish, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

<sup>5</sup>Aggertt and Bowen, op. cit., pp 11.

<sup>6</sup>Cornelius Carmen Cunningham, Literature as a Fine Art (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1941), p. 15.

strictly academic point of view, interpretation is a part of our educational history. Some of the oldest speech departments in the nation--such as the ones at University of Michigan and Northwestern University--are direct outgrowths of oral interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Lionel Crocker and Louis M. Eich, Oral Reading (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1955), p. 31.

## CHAPTER III

### CHOICE OF SUBJECT MATTER

Choosing the subject matter, or theme, for this oral reading selection was actually a matter of deduction. First of all, the writer felt that a whimsical topic would not be appropriate. The topic had to be serious, worthy of the title, "Thesis." This is not to say that it had to be bookish and unadorned, but the subject matter needed to be worthwhile. The importance of selecting a worthwhile subject for interpretation was emphasized by Plato who would have excluded poets from his ideal republic because of the vulgarity of their public readings. There is a type of person, he said,

who will narrate anything; . . . nothing will be too bad for him; and he will be ready to imitate anything, not as a joke, but in right, good earnest, and before a large company. . . . He will attempt to represent the role of thunder, the noise of wind and hail, or the creaking of wheels, and pulleys, and the various sounds of flutes, pipes, trumpets, and all sorts of instruments; he will bark like a dog, bleat like a sheep, or crow like a cock; his entire art will consist of imitation of voice and gesture.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the author realized that he would be offering to public view something of himself. Not only his intelligence, but also his system of values would be called into

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<sup>1</sup>Francis McDonald Cornford (trans.), The Republic of Plato (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 80-85.



question. Subject matter that seemed to be trash would not be suitable. The cannons of social good taste had to be observed.<sup>2</sup>

The likes and dislikes of the author were also considered. It would not have been advisable to prepare a subject in which the author had little or no interest, for boredom and inhibition would no doubt result. If a warm, personal, and direct communication was to be achieved, the author had to be interested in what he was doing, and eager that his hearers receive what he said and appreciate it. It was felt that subject matter interesting to the author would also be interesting to an audience if the reading dealt with a universal problem. While it would be difficult to find material that would immediately appeal to all persons regardless of their intellectual or cultural backgrounds, a topic was sought that would be potentially interesting to all people because it touched on a common experience--something with which an audience could easily become involved.<sup>3</sup>

These, and many other considerations, caused the author to write "Death Shall Die," a dialogue depicting a young boy's efforts to discover the purpose and meaning of his life. Although the reading, a summary of which follows,

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<sup>2</sup>Smith and Linn, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Lee, op. cit., p. 15.

dealt with death and man's search for truth--aspects of life which are common to all people--the subject also has a certain quality of immediacy. The recent Rockefeller Report on Education contained the following statement:

It is essential that we enable young people to see themselves as participants in one of the most exciting eras in history, and to have a sense of purpose in relation to it.<sup>4</sup>

In this spirit "Death Shall Die" tells of how a young boy found himself as an individual, then lost himself in interests, causes, and ideas larger and more enduring than himself.

A rainy afternoon in Seattle, Washington, is the scene as the dialogue opens. The principal character, simply referred to as "boy," for he is emblematic of all teenage boys, takes an airplane from Seattle to his home near Los Angeles. He talks of the weather, the beautiful Seattle skyline, then relaxes for a nap. However, he does not reach the Los Angeles airport, for the airplane crashes in Myrtle Creek, Oregon, and all passengers aboard perish. Suddenly death has become an experience for the boy--an unexpected experience. Before he has an opportunity to fully scrutinize the situation, the boy is greeted by Mary, the mother of Christ, and Aristotle, who have come to escort him from this world to the next.

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<sup>4</sup>William Nichols (ed.), A New Treasury of Words to Live By (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1959), p. 18.

In the next scene we find the boy standing on a hill overlooking his hometown. Aristototele and Mary have given him this opportunity to be alone and meditate. Later he is joined on the hill by Aristotle who carries with him the boy's Book of Life. All matters pertaining to the boy are recorded in the book. When the boy questions Aristotle concerning the fact that his book (his life) has ended after only seventeen years, Aristotle tells him that an end has not come to the book--a new translation is simply going to be written, as happens with all worthy books. At this point in the reading, Aristotle discloses himself to the boy as a translator. He states that he will help the boy translate his life into death so that the boy will then be prepared to have his Book of Life translated into the glories of the next experience. Throughout the course of the dialogue Aristotle stresses the importance of logical reasoning if life is to be understood. It soon becomes apparent that one is successfully translated into death only when he realizes that he is ready for death by virtue of the fact that he has truly lived. This requires that one "know thyself," and subsequently reach a point of mature individuality. When the boy realizes that mature individuality will lead one to become involved in mankind, the translation into death is complete, for we are successfully finished with the old version of our Book of Life (our earthly existence) only when we have lived for others.

In the final scene Mary, the ultimate translator, joins Aristotle and the boy on the hill. Aristotle helped the boy understand the logic in death. Mary will now escort the boy into the next experience. When the boy expresses concern for the many confused people left on earth, Mary explains that experience as well as reason, is important if one is to understand life. Experience will help those who are earthbound find themselves. They will realize that there is hope in the continuing cycle of life, for in the final analysis, only death shall die.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF ART ELEMENTS NECESSARY TO AN ORAL READING SELECTION

Although there are numerous ways to treat any subject it is unnecessary to mention that some ways are more effective than others. Certain factors seem to be common to all enjoyable readings. Therefore, it was necessary for the author to select touchstones that would help him assess the value of "Death Shall Die" as a piece of literature. The touchstones selected--found in Charlotte I. Lee's book, Oral Interpretation--were the extrinsic factors of universality, individuality, and suggestion, and the intrinsic factors of unity and harmony, variety and contrast, rhythm, and balance and proportion.<sup>1</sup> The interpretive reading systems and theories of other writers were studied--Lionel Crocker, Louis M. Eich, Martin Cobin, Cleanth Brooks--but the standards for a good oral reading selection explained by Lee were chosen because Lee was more directly concerned with the actual oral production of a work than were other writers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, op. cit., pp. 14-26.

<sup>2</sup> Although Lee's description and definition of intrinsic and extrinsic factors were used in this section, the terminology originally came from Literature as a Fine Art by C. C. Cunningham (New York: Ronald Press, 1941).

Moreover, the standards selected seemed to cover most of the important factors suggested by other writers.

Earlier in this paper we have mentioned the universality of "Death Shall Die." The topic--a boy's efforts to understand the purpose and meaning in life--touches on feelings common to most people. The boy's statement that he is "always jumping through hoops that other folks think are necessary," is surely a realization encountered by most people. Throughout the reading similar motives, feelings, and experiences were alluded to in an effort to assure a universality of response.

The second of the extrinsic factors to look for in an oral reading is individuality. Does the author treat his material in a unique way, or does the work sound like many other writings on the same or a similar theme? This factor of individuality is difficult for the inexperienced writer to achieve; nevertheless, during the writing of "Death Shall Die," individuality was retained as a goal. The following lines indicate the author's effort to reach that goal; "Granite peaks covered with snow and the dark green of stately conifers are backdrops for the city's seven hills--crowned with glistening buildings, washed clean by the day's rain." Such lines give personality to a reading selection and keep it from sounding like the work of dozens of other writers. The subject matter itself reflects some degree of

individuality, but a personal touch is achieved more especially in the way the subject has been treated. The mere choice of principal characters--Mary, Aristotle, and the typical young boy--give a freshness of expression to the material.

Suggestion is the third extrinsic factor necessary to a good oral reading. It has been said that, "The mark of a good book or poem is often not so much what it says as what it leaves unsaid and prompts you to think for yourself."<sup>3</sup> In "Death Shall Die" when the boy says "Life is really an oil painting--you lose sight of its true beauty if you stand too close," the audience is prompted to recall an image and an idea, yet the author's intended thought is not stated in black and white. This gives the members of an audience a chance to participate in the reading by drawing on their own experiences. Again the factor of suggestiveness is seen when Aristotle says, "Each Book of Life that concerns a truly worthy person is not discarded at the time of death but must be translated into a better language." What vistas of thought this opens up!

The three extrinsic factors--universality, individuality, and suggestion--will take the listeners beyond the words they hear and into the whole range of human experience. A

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<sup>3</sup>Aggertt and Bowen, op. cit., p. 80.

writer's ability to include these factors in his writing is usually determined by his knowledge of people, the extent of his experiences, and the degree of his acquaintance with literature.<sup>4</sup>

Intrinsic qualities--unity and harmony, variety and contrast, rhythm, and balance and proportion--have to do largely with the author's skill with words. These factors of art must be considered in the preparation of an oral reading selection if appealing, flowing language is to be achieved.

"Death Shall Die" contains many elements of unity that keep the listeners' minds focused in one channel of thought. The young boy, passing from confusion into understanding helps hold the material together. Unity is also strengthened by the fact that the dialogue takes place in a single setting--the hill above town. Moreover, the fact that very little time passes during the dialogue contributes to the unified effect.

Unity of effect is supported in "Death Shall Die" by harmony between words and ideas. Frivolous words were not used to decide serious thoughts. The author tried always to suit the words to the specific situation while at the same time keeping all in accord with the total theme of hope found in the continuing cycle of life. The characters were

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 78.



kept logical throughout the reading and although they were created in a situation of phantasy, their actions always had a logic in relation to their personalities and the situation in which they found themselves.

Without variety and contrast an oral reading would be dull and uninteresting; however, the two must work together to add a change of pace or to heighten an effect and must never be so great as to destroy unity. Variety was achieved in "Death Shall Die" when Aristotle and Mary stressed different factors in telling the boy how he could live the good life. Aristotle spoke of reasoning and its importance to one who would understand life. On the other hand, Mary felt that experience was the most vital factor. Variety was also provided by presenting the boy first in a confused state of mind, and then at the end of the dialogue, in an enlightened, reassured state.

We note contrast in the ages of the three characters. The boy is in late adolescence; Mary, in middle adulthood; and Aristotle is in late adulthood. The boy, with his uncertainty and many questions, is in contrast to the wisdom displayed by Aristotle and Mary.

Most people are not able to concentrate exclusively on an idea for a long period of time; therefore, rhythm in content is important to an oral reading. "Death Shall Die" establishes a rhythm of intellectual content in the recurrent

shift of attention from the boy to Aristotle, back to the boy, to Mary, and back to the boy. The alternation between description and narration in the first part of the reading, and dialogue and exposition in the last half of the reading continues to provide this important aspect of content.

The last intrinsic factors to be considered are balance and proportion. "In prose the author is careful to bring out his main intention by the amount of material and space he spends in elaborating a point."<sup>5</sup> If an author goes off on excursions into irrelevancies, he will appear to not fully grasp his subject, and his writing will be vague and unsatisfactory.

The balance point of "Death Shall Die" is reached near the middle. About the same degree of intensity and proportion of content lead up to and follow the point on which the material rests. The focal point of the selection is reached when the boy realizes that, "One has truly tasted life only when he has lived for others." In order to prevent audience interest from sagging before and after this point is reached, the following three peaks of interest were established in the selection: (1) the boy's death; (2) the presentation of Aristotle as the translator of life into death; and (3) the presentation of Mary as the translator of death into the next experience.

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<sup>5</sup>Crocker and Eich, loc. cit.

Although the intrinsic factors have been discussed separately, they are parts of the whole and should be considered in relation to all the qualities of the oral reading selection if they are to make a notable contribution to the total effect. We have made the intrinsic factors mutually exclusive merely for purposes of study.

## CHAPTER V

### EVALUATION

In the final analysis, let us record most sincerely that the preparation of this oral reading selection has been a rich and rewarding experience for the author. It has often been said that no idea is really ours until we vocalize it. The author had an idea--a thought about life--for some time, but only when he tried to share that thought with others was the thought so enlarged, so refined, that it became a part of himself. In order for the author to grasp his idea and hold it so firmly that, if offered to others, it wouldn't be completely taken from him, he was forced to discover the emotions underlying his thought, and then learn as much as possible about the import of all the words he used in the selection. Only then could he give expression to his thought. If it is true that no life can develop without some form of expression, then this project has been more than an academic requirement. It has been an enrichment for at least one life.

It would be difficult, as well as presumptuous, to say what this selection might mean to other people. We can say with assurance that within each of us there is a desire to communicate thoughts and emotions with others. The human is gregarious and has a spiritual craving that causes him often to be essentially lonely. An oral reading selection can

often satisfy this loneliness. Charles Laughton has stated that one reason people enjoy hearing selections read in public is that for the moment the listeners are all bound together, that they momentarily lose their sense of being alone.<sup>1</sup> How exciting it is to run the risk of being a part of this binding force!

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

## EPILOGUE

"'Tis to create, and in creating live  
A being more intense, that we endow  
With form our fancy, gaining as we give  
The life we image, even as I do now.  
What am I? Nothing; but not so art thou,  
Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,  
Invisible but gazing, as I glow  
Mixed with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,  
And feeling still with thee in my crushed feeling's dearth."

"Child Harold's Pilgrimage"  
Canto III, Stanza VI  
George Gordon, Lord Byron

DEATH SHALL DIE

A Dialogue For Oral Interpretation

Boy

I could hear the rain dashing in big drops on the steaming streets that day in Seattle, just as it had done every afternoon since I arrived in September. Twenty-seven days, and a part of each day had been reserved for Mother Nature who would shake her clouds in a spirit of wild grace until they released their moisture and freshened the city. Actually, Seattle has the most unoriginal weather I have ever encountered. Its either raining, working up to it, or drying off constantly. People in Seattle really do make appointments by the rain--it isn't just a myth. If someone says to you, "I'll see you after the rain tomorrow," you know they mean three o'clock. Three o'clock in the afternoon is the time my airplane left on that certain unusual day I started to tell you about.

Don't misunderstand me; I could have taken a flight out of Seattle any time of the day. Rain never seems to affect Seattle's flying schedules--it doesn't affect much of anything up there, except transplanted Southern Californians, like myself. Having been born and reared near Los Angeles, I just didn't have the heart to do something real important, like flying home, while the rain was coming down. In Southern California we're taught to have a little more reverence where rain is concerned. Rain in our part of the country, is treated more like we treat my Aunt Catherine.



She doesn't visit us often, but when she does come, we stay out of her way and regard her with great respect, for she's usually ill-humored and somewhat unpredictable. Coming from that tradition, I couldn't consider flying home from Seattle before the rain stopped. Besides, it gave me an insecure feeling to picture the pilot of my plane sitting squarely before the controls in full dress uniform, with his heavily braided blue cap pulled rakishly over one eye, and overshoes on his feet. I'm never at my best in overshoes--I don't think that anyone is.

Anyway, the rain had stopped when our plane left the Seattle airport. We taxied down the runway for about one-half mile, veered to the left and then, with a muffled roar, rumbled back toward the terminal. We passed between the terminal and some hangers and continued on for the longest time. Just as I began to think that we were going to take the freeway to Los Angeles, the runway faded from view and we were soon high over the city.

What a breathtakingly beautiful sight--flying out of Seattle in the afternoon. Granite peaks powdered with snow and the dark green of stately conifers were backdrops for the cities seven hills, crowned with glistening buildings, washed clean by the day's rain. I didn't want to look out the windows often, because everyone else was reading newspapers or paper back novels and acted as though they did that

sort of thing every day. I did sneak a peek at the television tower on Queen Anne Hill. My apartment was next to that tower. Soon we were higher and I couldn't see the land any more because of the clouds. Seattle has a lot of cloudy days in the fall of the year.

I didn't ever see Seattle again. As soon as we were in the air sleep crept in and relaxed me. That's what happens every time I start traveling. I dreamed of what it would be like to be in the pilot's cabin...twisting rows of complicated dials with insolent skill...giving orders to my crew. Perhaps I should have been up front, for it was all over with before I knew it. There was a cry, a very loud cry. A dreadful clamor, modulated in savage discords, filled my ears. The sheer unexpectedness of it made my hair stir. I heard the sirens and people scrambling over the wreckage. I had about decided to pray when they found me, but I was dead. At first I didn't see anyone else, but I'm sure everyone on that flight was dead. The plane was scattered over most of Myrtle Creek, Oregon.

Then a funny thing happened. I looked up and saw someone in the distance--a man carrying a large book--moving swiftly toward me. The man had a thin body, and a pale face, made whiter by the blue veins marking his hallow temples. His grey eyes, deep under a high-arched forehead, were fixed on me. Suddenly, as he stepped to my side, he was no longer

alone. Mary was with him. Oh, it was Mary alright. Older than I would have thought, but I've been to Sunday School enough to know Mary. I was rather surprised to see her in the middle of that mournful uproar, but before I could speak, the elderly gentleman bent down and said to me, in his low resonant voice, "My boy, this is Mary and I am Aristotle." Just like that. "We've come to escort you to eternal peace. Are you prepared to depart?" Well, I could tell by the way he said it that he didn't just mean was I ready to leave Myrtle Creek. The fact that he had something a little more thorough in mind was stressed by the feeling of sincere concern radiated by Mary's dark eyes. After remaining open-mouthed for a full minute I suggested that maybe he was a little previous, because I'm only seventeen, but he said that there are some organizations that just don't make mistakes. Anyway, that's why I'm on this hill now, above the town where I was born.

Looking down toward town makes me feel kind of excited all over--its such a beautiful sight. That grove of aspen just at the edge of West Lane is brilliant this October day. Some clumps of trees are still light green; some have just begun to turn; others have already been transformed by a soft lion-gold hue, I wonder...it seems ages since I last stopped and really took note of the leaves changing colors. Is there very much that's more important

than this? A cool breeze is coming down the valley and making every leaf tremble. I'm tempted, just a little, to follow that breeze through the glitter of the aspen to home.

Aristotle and Mary said that I could stay here for a little while, just so I'd be sure that life is going to continue without me. I think they wanted me to be reassured that my family could endure this tragedy so that I wouldn't worry later. I stayed around the house for a little while, but that was unbearably sad. My father was trying to be comforting, but the family and all the people who came by the house were really not holding up well. I couldn't blame them either, because the first thing they saw when they got inside the house was my box--right in the middle of the parlor. The box had been placed between the spinet and the green chesterfield--the one mom wants to have recovered. Oh, the box was closed alright, but that just made matters worse. Everyone knew why the box was closed. What could you expect, crashing from 8,500 feet?

Its going to all be over soon. The graveside service this afternoon will be brief. Old Reverend Dodd doesn't like to stand out in the heat of a mid-day sun. Its going to be a dazzling warm day. By noon the dust and smoke of town life will be riding high in the heavens, casting a haze about the valley. The town's sharp lines are already becoming softer and more remote--a bit out of focus. This is a glorious

spot! I can't help wanting to sit here in the afternoon sun for a long time. Why must death take me? Lately I've been so wrapped up in the affairs of everyday life that I have almost lost sight of the truly important things. When you stand on this hill and look down to the town, the farms and factories, the school yards and corn fields, the vineyards and green pastures, somehow its easier to breath deeply of life and put things in their proper perspective. I wish that I had come to this hill more often. Life is really a fine oil painting--you lose sight of its true beauty if you stand overly close. Why does everything have to end so suddenly--just when I've found my hill? Perhaps Aristotle can answer me. I see him coming now--still carrying that huge book he carried the first time we met.

Aristotle

Pardon me my boy, I've interrupted your contemplation. And what a beautiful place to contemplate.

Boy

I was contemplating things that are more in your realm than mine. What's the book you're carrying.

Aristotle

You must remember that now our realms are the same. This is your Book of Life. In it are recorded all matters pertaining to you.

Boy

Just me? Pretty long book for such a short life.

Aristotle

You were rather active.

Boy

Why did death have to be written in so soon? Standing on this hill I was just beginning to understand myself a little, and now, why must everything end?

Aristotle

The time is appropriate my boy. This is indicated by the fact that seeking complete self-knowledge is a life-time job. You are beginning to understand yourself better, because the allotted time for the job has almost passed. You make death sound like a conquering army that has achieved some great success by swooping down on you in the night and carrying you away. Why make him look as though he had taken the spring out of the year? Death is nothing to fear. Its nothing more than a little sleep. Why, there are countless poppies and potions that can make you sleep just as well. Look to death as a pleasure, for after one short sleep has passed, you wake eternally in a better life.

Boy

I don't really understand. You make it sound as though tomorrow was going to be a good deal like yesterday, only with a little more sunshine. Yet, you have the Book of Life in your hand. With a book there's a beginning and an ending, and when you get to the end, there just isn't any more.

Aristotle

Well my boy, if such is the case, do you suppose that when a person dies the Great Author of all mankind simply picks up the Book of Life concerning that particular individual, stamps DISCARD across the pages, and casts the book on a junk pile?

Boy

What else can you do with an old book? Oh, you might not throw it away--you might just put it on the shelf somewhere--but the result is the same. The book is closed. Its out of circulation.

Aristotle

Is that always the case? What happens to books that are truly worth-while? Are they discarded?

Boy

Well...no, I guess not. If its really a good book, its usually translated into other languages. Maybe even made into a movie.

Aristotle

And so it is with a genuinely good life. Each Book of Life that has to do with a truly worthy person is not discarded at the time of death, but must be translated into a better language. We have come to the last page in your book, but the book is not closed. Only the old version is finished. A new and more magnificent translation lies ahead of you.

Before you can begin that new translation you must logically understand why the old version is completed. I will stand here with you, on this beautiful hill--gazing over the valleys and plateaus of your past--and help you translate your life into this new experience, death.

Boy

How very strange...a short while ago death was just a word, and now it is an experience. I didn't have any sort of special feeling that told me I had really lived and was now ready for something new.

Aristotle

That is why I am here my boy, to serve as a translator. You need to translate your life into death before a new translation of your book can be written. Together we shall bind up all the scattered leaves of your life and you will see that you were ready for death by virtue of the fact that you had lived. Tell me, do you feel totally unprepared to go on toward new horizons?

Boy

It's just that I worry about leaving. My grandpa--that's funny, I haven't thought about him in a long time--he used to say that we are all the sum total of our actions. You know, death is a strange thing, for it makes a fellow stop and think, I've begun to understand my own merit a little, standing here on this hill. I realize now that I've



made few people happy--contributed so little to the world. It's almost as though I were leaving a job half finished. Whatever it was I was supposed to do just didn't quite get done. That, I think, is why I don't feel ready to leave.

### Aristotle

A job? Yes...you would look at it that way. Do you truly suppose that it is your duty to leave the world running smoothly, contentedly? That's something no other mortal has been able to accomplish. Oh, you're quite correct when you suggest that we become what we do, that is why a book has been kept on you. You see, you are the sum total of your actions, and I couldn't figure that in my head. Nevertheless, I think that your character has received sufficient time for growth and development.

### Boy

I only wish that I had been able to remove some of the confusion that surrounds us--to clarify something--to help even one individual see what the world is about and how he could fit into it significantly. Perhaps in the process I might have received some increased insight. I'm only seventeen years old. There are an awful lot of seventeen year olds down there. Many of them simply don't feel a sense of purpose. I know what they're going through--trying to determine whether or not what they do will really make a difference. It's a tragedy to fail or succeed and feel that

neither matters. There's an obsession down there of keeping busy, often with activities of little value--anything to avoid an awareness of being alive.

### Aristotle

People should come to this place on the hill often. If one stands here and looks back, it's easy to understand the importance of what Plato said centuries ago, "Know thyself." Such advice as this I once passed on to my son, I told him, as I shall now tell you, that we must be logical and not hide from ourselves, for the more we hide, the more we distrust ourselves--just as we fear and distrust most strangers. Only when we find ourselves through correct reasoning can we live the good life and be prepared to depart in peace. Sometimes we find a clue in some chance remark by an old friend, a bit read in some wise book, a fleeting thought during a moment of deep feeling and deeper meditation.

### Boy

Offhand it wouldn't seem difficult to put your words into action, for it should be as easy as pie to know oneself. After all, we exchange intimate thoughts more with ourselves than with anyone else. Is it really that easy to find oneself and avoid distress in death?

### Aristotle

Distress in death? The translation is far from clear if you see only distress in death and do not understand

that, in your case, it was the next natural and necessary step.

Boy

I suppose it's really the distress in life that worries me and prevents me from making a clear translation from life into death. Life is often so confusing that I can't help worrying about whether or not people will find themselves. Oh, don't misunderstand me. I've been happy most of the time during my seventeen years. I have had a lot of fun--sometimes a little more fun than was necessary in order to meet the requirements for the title "Well Rounded."

Aristotle

Yes, my boy, so we were informed before being assigned this particular mission. We will try not to lose any of the original flavor of your book through translation, but you know how censorship boards function. However, we can overlook a good portion of your, ah...enthusiasm for life because of your youth. Such spirit as yours is needed in the halls of eternity. You have managed to telescope so much into your seventeen years--to truly live all your life--that it was felt you were ready to make a contribution to the next experience. You see, many people have difficulty adjusting to eternity. The newness of a timeless existence causes many people to adopt a dreadfully slow pace. Such people are in danger of losing their individuality. You will serve as a fine example of individuality.

Boy

But I'm only seventeen. I've never done anything stupendous. Only had my name in the paper three times--when I was born, when I graduated from the eighth grade, and then two days ago. There isn't any danger that I might lose my individuality, for I don't think I possess such a thing.

Aristotle

You must have reached a point of mature individuality, or we would not have been sent for you. The old version of your Book of Life must contain individuality before a new translation can be written.

Boy

To me, individuality indicates a certain amount of self-assuredness. I've always been concerned by the fact that I have no definite opinion about so many topics. Other people can spout rigid theories about innumerable subjects, but just as I think I've reached a conclusion, something good about an opposing viewpoint usually appears.

Aristotle

Ah, ha...just as I suspected. You have indeed reached a point of mature individuality, for the young are sure of everything, the old are sure of nothing. If you possessed no individuality you would take many firm but popular stands in an effort to win public approval. You are ready for us. A man that is young in years may be old in hours, if he has

wasted no time. You seemed always to realize that life is movement and is something to be used. If your life was a bit confusing at times, it was because you guided your conduct not by considerations of what was useful, but what was noble. The useful would have been good only for yourself. The noble was good absolutely, and therefore, difficult at times to ascertain. It is simply a matter of looking at the world logically and realizing that life is best when you are performing acts suitable to you, yet beneficial to others. Such logical reasoning will prevent one from succumbing to a common pit-fall--trying day after day to be what he is not and ignoring those qualities within his being that are not quite like the qualities of any other person--the qualities that make him an individual.

Boy

Do you mean that if a person develops his individuality he will find himself?

Aristotle

Not only will he find himself, but he will be able to fulfill himself and grow into the broadest, deepest, most vital person possible. Only then will he be able to perform acts that are beneficial to himself and the world.

Boy

I think that I'm beginning to understand. Earlier I wondered how a person knows when he has lived. You have

helped me to see the answer. By logical self appraisal a fellow must develop his individual capabilities, do what his good sense tells him he can do best, and not worry about being like someone else. Then he will be able to really get to know himself, and be able to become involved in mankind by giving of himself to others. One has truly tasted life only when he has lived for others.

Mary

My boy, my boy! I should have known you anywhere by your words. You accurately understand the translation. What a pleasure it will be to have you with us. You are no longer earth bound! Now you will know the next experience.

Boy

Mary...how, how do you do?

Mary

Aristotle, isn't he marvelous? So young, yet ready to live that life one cannot out-live. My son, Aristotle helped you comprehend the logic to be found within death. I come to you as the ultimate translator. By my side you shall journey onward and upward into the glories of the next experience--a new adventure. In your wildest moments of imagination you have not conceived what lies ahead.

Boy

That seems very likely, for even standing on this hill it has been difficult to conceive what lies behind me. In

the past I have often been uncertain about many matters. Do people usually enter the next experience when they have been so uncertain?

Mary

You were uncertain for a most certain reason. It is one thing to be uncertain simply because you are not interested, but quite another to be uncertain because you care so intensely about people and ideas beyond the limit of yourself that you want to develop what is good and worthwhile within them and not discard them merely because they are not perfect, or do not altogether meet your standards. This beautiful desire to bring out the best in others forced you to fully develop your own talents. After all, my son, rare is the doctor who feels up to giving his best to his patients, unless he has taken care of his own health. The end result was that, through your caring, you came to know yourself. Later self-acceptance and still later self-giving came about. What a joyous progression!

Boy

If I only had taken time to stop and consider that progression I think I might have given much more; might have helped more people find their place on earth. There are many people my age who treat each other as pegs to be forced into certain holes, and thrown away if they do not fit. They don't always see the need for extending themselves to

others. I think it's because they're just a little lost themselves.

Mary

Such people will develop their individuality and find themselves only when they care enough to give of themselves.

Boy

I would tell them that, if I could, but I'm not sure that it would do any good. The world makes so many demands that sometimes a fellow just doesn't know what he should be trying to accomplish. He's always jumping through hoops that other folks seem to think are necessary. After a while he forgets how to jump, unless he sees a hoop in front of him.

Mary

You're absolutely right. Hoop jumping was popular even when I was young. Well ordained and disciplined societies make it necessary for one to have more than logic if he is to reach individuality and live the good life. Reason must be combined with experience! We must live our lives in the fullest, most worth-while manner, and avoid saying, "I'm doing too much. Let someone else do something." If one dies in a sincere pursuit he is like the soldier wounded in the heat of battle--for a time he scarce feels the hurt; in like manner, a mind and heart that are fixed upon what is good and worthwhile cannot help but develop an intimate



knowledge of some kind of working material--some medium that is to be understood and respected, and through which insight and caring can be expressed. Logic shows us the path, but experience gives us the ability and courage to take the first step.

Aristotle

Courage, Mary? What courage does a man need, other than to know that a certain plan is logical?

Mary

He needs the courage that can come only from experiencing life. Through instruction one may know and logically understand what major forces individualize him, yet he cannot take advantage of those forces, such as determining what he wonders about and remembers, unless he has experienced enough of life, either directly or vicariously, to make his remembrances meaningful. A person would find it difficult to make a decision concerning where he likes to go when he has free time, if he has nothing to choose from because his free time has always been spent in the same place. Moreover, if one does not read in a variety of fields, how can he know what current researches he would like to follow with absorbed interest? In a very basic measure decisions about these matters--decisions that come with experience--reveal to a person what he is. By becoming involved in these matters outside oneself, the fulfilled self grows strong, sound

and resourceful, able to be affirmative and creative in dealing with future experiences.

Boy

It must be that logic and experience together will help us know ourselves and then realize the potential glory in all life.

Aristotle

My boy, just as you have come to know the importance of logic and experience to those who would strive to understand life, so in your comprehension there is hope that the world will come to know itself.

Mary

How exciting it is to realize that, although maximum self-knowledge will usually come only with the final moment--as in your case--one can be assured that people will try harder and more honestly to reach that point of perfection.

Aristotle

Perhaps you can now see that you needn't be greatly concerned with leaving some confusion on the earth. Confusion is a good sign. More and more people are beginning to realize that their lives have not been quite in tune with the total symphony. If everyone down there was complacent--felt that matters were going along as they should--I would be concerned. But men are beginning to climb these hills and look around. More do it with every passing day. And when a man

stands at the summit of his hill receiving this total view, he finds hope in the continuing cycle of life and realizes what he must do if that cycle is to be lived to the fullest. The magnitude of the result that he accomplishes for mankind is not important, but the permanent desire to really benefit other people is extremely important to the never ending cycle.

Boy

How wonderful to know that you have a vital role in that great cycle.

Mary

My son, you are now ready to hasten toward that next experience. The new translation of your book lies all before you. Shall we start?

Boy

Do we have far to go?

Aristotle

No, my boy, just a little ways--down this path, past the smiling aspen--past the sunset.

Boy

Past the sunset...and then our parting from the old translation. Oh, let us hurry toward that parting!

Mary

My son, it is not a parting we're going toward, but a most important meeting. Straighten your cap.

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